



POLI:3505:001 | SPRING 2026

CIVIL WARS

[The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#)

Course Instructor

Instructor: Sara Mitchell, Professor, [Department of Political Science](#)

Email: sara-mitchell@uiowa.edu; **Phone:** 335-2356

Drop-in Hours

Drop-in Hours (309 SH): Wednesday, 12:00-3:00pm

Students are invited to drop by during the professor's drop-in hours to discuss questions about the course material or address any other concerns. I am also available by appointment if you are unable to attend drop-in hours. To meet on Zoom, please email me to request a Zoom link.

Academic Course Home

[Department of Political Science](#)
[The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences](#)

Class Meeting Times

Tuesday & Thursday, 11:00am-12:15pm, 14 Schaeffer Hall (SH)

Course Site

To access the course site, log into [Iowa Courses Online \(ICON\)](#) using your Hawk ID and password.

Course Policies

Please see University policies here:

<https://provost.uiowa.edu/student-course-policies>

Other policies are listed at the end of the syllabus.

Department Executive Officer (DEO):

Professor Julianna Pacheco: polisci@uiowa.edu or julianna-pacheco@uiowa.edu

Course Description and Goal

Course Description:

Civil war is the most prevalent, deadly form of violence in the international system today. Violent conflict rages all over the world, from Sudan and Iraq to Ukraine, Nigeria, and Yemen. What causes these internal conflicts to break out? Are groups like ISIS and Boko Haram motivated by religious extremism or greed? What can be done to end the violence and to minimize the costs of these wars? This course examines the causes, management, and consequences of violent internal conflict. The first part of the class examines factors that make civil wars more (or less) likely to occur, such as greed, grievance, ethnic conflict, economic development, income, natural resources, and regime type. The second part of the course explores how civil wars are fought, why they tend to last so long, the consequences of civil war for civilian populations, and how civil wars end. The final section of the class tackles questions regarding what the international community can do to prevent civil wars in at-risk countries and peacefully resolve ongoing crises in Sudan, Myanmar, and beyond.

Course Learning Goals: After taking this class, students should be able to:

- Identify the causes of civil wars over the past two centuries.
- Translate knowledge from large-N analyses to specific wars, such as conflicts in Lebanon or Sudan.
- Describe empirical findings of articles using statistical analysis.
- Devise strategies for terminating civil wars and maintaining post-war peace .

Required Textbooks

T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell. 2023. *What Do We Know about Civil Wars? Second Edition*. New York: Bloomsbury. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/what-do-we-know-about-civil-wars-9781538169155/>.

ISBN: 978153169162 (paperback, \$43.20); ISBN: 9798765182581 (e-text, \$43.20). You can purchase copies online or through local bookstores.

Electronic links to journal articles or other readings can be found on the course website (icon.uiowa.edu) and they are marked with an asterisk (*). You can earn two extra credit points by emailing me a picture of Grogu from the TV show The Mandalorian before the first exam.

Grading Criteria

Final course grades will be assessed based on the student's performance in the following items:

Graded Item	Points	% of final grade
Class Attendance and Participation	150	30%
Research Paper	150	30%
Exams (Midterm and Final)	200	40%
Total Points:	500	100%

Graded Item	Points	% of final grade
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Course grades will be distributed as follows:

99-100: A+	77-79: C+	Below 60: F
93-98: A	73-76: C	
90-92: A-	70-72: C-	
87-89: B+	67-69: D+	
83-86: B	63-66: D	
80-82: B-	60-62: D-	

Course Policies

- **Collaboration:** While you are expected to discuss with other students in class, all written work is individual and should not be undertaken in collaboration.
- **Late Assignment Policy:** Any paper component submitted after the due date will be assigned a 10% penalty per day late.
- **Grade Questions:** If for some reason you are dissatisfied with the final grade received on your final paper, you may submit a written memo to the instructor explaining why you think the grade is unfair. This memo must be submitted within 1 week of receiving the grade. Your instructor will read the memo, re-read the paper, and then assign a new grade. The instructor reserves the right to assign a lower grade after reading the paper/assignment again.
- **Communication:** All electronic communications will be posted as announcements on ICON. I recommend you have ICON notifications sent to your University of Iowa email address. See information about the use of UI email for all communications in the university policies section.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage:** Students may not use AI for any written assignments, papers, or exams. Penalties for AI usage include grade deductions or zero credit.

Course Structure

This course meets twice per week and is run as a group discussion. Students will find course information on the ICON page (icon.uiowa.edu), including links for submitting paper assignments.

Students are expected to:

- **Review** the course syllabus to learn about the overall course structure, purpose, and deadlines.
- **Read** assigned readings before each class. The date listed after each reading is the day it is due.
- **Attend** class and participate in discussions. Discussion questions for each class are posted on ICON.
- **Submit** assignments by designated deadlines **via the ICON "Assignments."**

Course Work

Class Attendance and Participation: 30% (150 points)

This course will be run as an upper division seminar. Each class period (26 in total excluding week 1) will involve a discussion of the assigned readings for that day. Discussion questions for each class will be posted on ICON by the day before class. You can earn up to six points per class which are comprised of attendance and participation components.

- Attendance: Each student receives two points for attendance in each class. You can miss a total of three classes without penalty, but any missed class after three will subtract two points from your attendance points. For example, if you missed 5 classes, you would lose four points from your attendance total.
- Participation: You can earn four additional points for participation in each class by answering a discussion question, making comments on other students' remarks, asking questions about the readings, etc. You are only required to speak once for points, although you can talk more than once if you desire. If no one volunteers, then I will randomly call on people. If the person selected is unprepared, they have a chance to pass once and then answer another question. Being absent or unprepared to answer results in a two-point penalty for the randomly selected student. *To earn an A, you need to participate in 50% or more of the classes.* If you took any attendance penalty points, then you could make those up on the participation side (e.g., the person who missed five classes would need to participate in 15 classes to get to an A). You can earn more than 100% of the points by participating in more than 50% of classes (assuming no attendance penalty). You earn 1% additional points (beyond 100) for every two classes you participate in beyond 13.

You may wonder why I have created such a system. The answer is that I want you to do the reading, so I have given you an incentive to do it. All the papers and exams will make extensive use of the assigned readings; thus, it is in your best interest to read everything. Given the size of the class, it will be necessary to create a seating chart the first week of class. Please make sure you find the seat you want for the rest of the semester by Thursday, January 22nd. I will provide more information on the points system overall in class.

Research Paper: 30% (150 points)

You will write a research paper that applies concepts and theories discussed in the course to a specific civil war. The paper will cover the history and the causes of the war and each student will be assigned to a different civil war. You can find a detailed description of the paper on ICON.

Deadline #1: Submit list of top five civil war preferences: Due on Tuesday, January 27th

Deadline #2: First Draft of History Section: Due on Thursday, February 26th

Deadline #3: First Draft of Theory Section: Due on Monday, March 30th

Deadline #4: Final Paper: Due on Monday, May 11th

Exams (Midterm & Final): 40% (200 points)

The midterm exam (20%, 100 points) is scheduled on Thursday, March 5th and the final exam (20%, 100 points) is scheduled by the university during finals week (May 11th-15th). The exams may include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. The 80-minute final exam is NOT comprehensive. A make-up exam will be given only to students with medical or personal emergencies. If an emergency arises, you will need to contact me **before** the exam or you will receive zero credit. Both exams are taken in the classroom.

Course Calendar

Learning Objectives	Learning Activities & Assignments (MM=Mason & Mitchell)
Week 1 Course Introduction and Civil War Patterns/Data (January 19-23)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate scholars' definitions of civil wars • Analyze empirical patterns of civil wars 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read: MM, Introduction pp. 1-12; https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjel2nn22z9o (1/20) ▪ Read MM Chapters 1 and 15 (1/22)
SECTION I: THE CAUSES OF CIVIL WAR	
Week 2 Greed vs. Grievance (January 26-30)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze how greed and grievance influence civil war onset • Apply theories to Mozambique 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read *Collier & Hoeffler (2004) (1/27) ● Read MM Chapter 2; *Case: Mozambique (1/29) ● Submit list of top five preferred civil wars (by 1/27)
Week 3 State Strength and Insurgency (February 2-6)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiate factors that influence states' abilities to put down insurgencies • Evaluate conflict in Northern Ireland 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read *Fearon & Laitin (2004) (2/3) ● Read MM Chapter 4; *Case: Northern Ireland (2/5)
Week 4 Natural Resources (February 9-13)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the relationship between natural resources, the environment, and civil wars • Use the theories to understand conflict in Indonesia 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read MM Chapter 13 *Case: Indonesia (2/10) ● Read *Ross (2004) (2/12)
Week 5 Ethnicity and Religion (February 16-20)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classify identity aspects of civil wars • Apply identity concepts to civil conflict in Bosnia 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read MM Chapter 3, *Case: Bosnia (2/17) ● Read *Toft (2007) (2/19)

Week 6 | Geography and Transnational Dimensions (February 23-27)

Learning Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investigate role of geography in civil wars• Appraise geographical and transnational dynamics of Lebanon's civil war	Learning Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read: *Buhaug and Gates (2002); *Case: Lebanon (2/24)• Read: MM Chapter 5, *Salehyan & Gleditsch (2006) (2/26)• Submit first draft of history section for paper by 11:59pm on Thursday, 2/26.
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Week 7 | Regime Type and Exam 1 (March 2-6)

Learning Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize connections between democratic institutions and violence• Exam 1 (covers weeks 1-7)	Learning Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read *Hegre et al (2001) (3/3)• Exam 1, Thursday (3/5)
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SECTION II: CIVIL WAR DURATION, OUTCOMES, AND CONSEQUENCES

Week 8 | War Duration and Termination (March 9-13)

Learning Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compare civil wars to understand why some last longer than others• Use general theories of civil war duration to understand the intractability of the Sudanese conflict	Learning Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read MM Chapter 6, *Case: Sudan (3/10)• Read *Fearon (2004) (3/12)
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Week 9 | Spring Break (March 16-20): No Class

Week 10 | Recurrence (March 23-27)

Learning Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weigh factors that create severe post-war consequences and renewed violence	Learning Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No Class, ISA Conference (3/24)• Read *Walter (2004) (3/26)
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Week 11 | Health Consequences and Women in Combat (March 30-April 3)

Learning Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess civilian risks in war-torn countries• Learn about the role of women in combat	Learning Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read MM Chapter 10 (3/31)• Read *Henshaw (2016) (4/2)• Submit first draft of theory part of paper by 11:59pm on Monday 3/30.
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Week 12 Gender and Child Soldiers (April 6-10)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess how gender and violence are connected • Evaluate prevalence of child soldiers in Nigeria & beyond 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read MM Chapter 12 (4/7) • Read *Lasley & Thyne (2015); *Case: Nigeria (4/9)
SECTION III: BREAKING THE CONFLICT TRAP	
Week 13 Militias and Transitional Justice (April 13-17)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the distinctions between criminal and rebel groups • Learn about transitional justice in Bosnia 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read MM Chapter 16 (4/14) • Read MM Chapter 11 & King & Meernik (2017) (4/16)
Week 14 Peace Agreements and Peacekeeping (April 20-24)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct a post-war agreement that creates more durable peace 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read MM Chapter 8 (4/21) • Read MM Chapters 7 and 9 (4/23)
Week 15 Environment and Disasters (April 27-May 1)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See how environmental factors influence civil wars 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read MM Chapter 14 & *Mitchell et al (2024) (4/28) • Read *Tominaga & Le (2021) (4/30)
Week 16 Post-Conflict Stability and Final Review (May 4-8)	
<p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify how rebel governance assists in post-conflict stability 	<p>Learning Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read *Park (2024) (5/5) • Review for final exam (5/7) • Submit "Final Paper" by 11:59pm on Monday, 5/11.
FINAL EXAM	Will be scheduled by the University during finals week (5/11-5/15)

UNIVERSITY & ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES

Course's College (Administrative Home)

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the home of this course, and CLAS governs the add and drop deadlines, academic misconduct policies, and other undergraduate policies and procedures. Other UI colleges may have different policies.

Academic Honesty and Misconduct

All students in CLAS courses are expected to abide by the [college's standards of academic honesty](#). Undergraduate academic misconduct must be reported by instructors to CLAS according to [these procedures](#).

Student Complaints

Students with a complaint about a grade or a related matter should first discuss the situation with the instructor and/or the course supervisor (if applicable), and finally with the DEO (Chair) of the department, school or program offering the course. Sometimes students will be referred to the department or program's Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) or Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

Undergraduate students should contact [CLAS Undergraduate Programs](#) for support when the matter is not resolved at the previous level. Graduate students should contact the [CLAS Graduate Affairs Manager](#) when additional support is needed.

Drop Deadline for this Course

You may drop an individual course before the drop deadline; after this deadline you will need collegiate approval. You can look up the drop deadline for this course [here](#). When you drop a course, a "W" will appear on your transcript. The mark of "W" is a neutral mark that does not affect your GPA. To discuss how dropping (or staying in) a course might affect your academic goals, please contact your Academic Advisor. Directions for adding or dropping a course and other registration changes can be found on the [Registrar's website](#). Undergraduate students can find policies on dropping CLAS courses [here](#). Graduate students should adhere to the [academic deadlines](#) and policies set by the Graduate College.

UI Email

Students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for any communication with instructors or staff in the UI community. For the privacy and the protection of student records, UI faculty and staff can only correspond with UI email addresses.

Date and Time of the Final Exam

The [final examination date and time](#) will be announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes, and it will be announced on the course ICON site once it is known. Do not plan your end of the semester travel plans until the final exam schedule is made public. It is your responsibility to know the date, time, and place of the final exam. According to the Registrar's final exam policy, students have a maximum of two weeks after the announced final exam schedule to request a change if an exam conflict exists or if a student has more than two exams scheduled for the same day (see the [policy](#) here).

Resources for Students

Tutor Iowa: <https://tutor.uiowa.edu/>

Students will find the Writing Center and the Speaking Center very useful for this course.

Writing Center: <http://writingcenter.uiowa.edu/>

Speaking Center: <http://speakingcenter.uiowa.edu/>

Attendance and Accommodations

Absences from Class

University regulations require that students be allowed to make up examinations which have been missed due to illness, religious holy days, military service obligations, including service-related medical appointments, jury duty, or other unavoidable circumstances or other university-sponsored activities. Students should work with their instructors regarding making up other missed work, such as assignments, quizzes, and classroom attendance.

Absences for Religious Holy Days

The university is prepared to make reasonable accommodations for students whose religious holy days coincide with their classroom assignments, test schedules, and classroom attendance expectations. Students must notify their instructors in writing of any such religious holy day conflicts or absences within the first few days of the semester or session, and no later than the third week of the semester. If the conflict or absence will occur within the first three weeks of the semester, the student should notify the instructor as soon as possible. See [Policy Manual 8.2 Absences for Religious Holy Days](#) for additional information.

Absences for Military Service Obligations

Students absent from class or class-related requirements due to U.S. veteran or U.S. military service obligations (including military service–related medical appointments, military orders, and National Guard Service obligations) shall be excused without any grading adjustment or other penalty. Instructors shall make reasonable accommodations to allow students to make up, without penalty, tests and assignments they missed because of veteran or military service obligations. Reasonable accommodations may include making up missed work following the service obligation; completing work in advance; completing an equivalent assignment; or waiver of the assignment without penalty. In all instances, students bear the responsibility to communicate with their instructors about such veteran or military service obligations, to meet course expectations and requirements.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The University is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. If a student has a diagnosed disability or other disabling condition that may impact the student's ability to complete the course requirements as stated in the syllabus, the student may seek accommodations through [Student Disability Services](#) (SDS). SDS is responsible for making [Letters of Accommodation \(LOA\)](#) available to the student. **The student must provide an LOA to the instructor as early in the semester as possible, but requests not made at least two weeks prior to the scheduled activity for which an accommodation is sought may not be accommodated.** The LOA will specify what reasonable course accommodations the student is eligible for and those the instructor should provide. Additional information can be found on the [SDS website](#).

Students are welcome to initiate **conversations** about any accommodations such as those related to any of the above reasons (disabilities, religious holy days, military service, etc.). If you would like to discuss accommodations, please send me an email to set up a time when we can discuss about what constitutes a reasonable accommodation for the specific circumstance.

Free Speech and Expression

The University of Iowa supports and upholds the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech and the principles of academic and artistic freedom. We are committed to open inquiry, vigorous debate, and creative expression inside and outside of the classroom. Visit the [Free Speech at Iowa website](#) for more information on the university's policies on free speech and academic freedom.

Non-discrimination Statement

The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination in employment, educational programs, and activities on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy (including childbirth and related conditions), disability, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, service in the U.S. military, sexual orientation, gender identity, or associational preferences. The university also affirms its commitment to providing equal opportunities and equal access to university facilities. For additional information on nondiscrimination policies, contact the Senior Director, Office of Civil Rights Compliance, the University of Iowa, 202 Jessup Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242-1316, 319-335-0705, ui-ocrc@uiowa.edu. Although not required, students have the option to share their pronouns and chosen/preferred names in class, and their [gender](#) and chosen/preferred [names](#) through MyUI. Instructors and advisors can find information about a student's chosen/preferred name in MyUI.

Classroom Expectations

Students are expected to comply with University policies regarding appropriate classroom behavior as outlined in the [Code of Student Life](#). While students have the right to express themselves and participate freely in class, it is expected that students will behave with the same level of courtesy and respect in the virtual class setting (whether asynchronous or synchronous) as they would in an in-person classroom. Failure to follow behavior expectations as outlined in the [Code of Student Life](#) may be addressed by the instructor and may also result in discipline under the [Code of Student Life](#) policies governing E.5 Disruptive Behavior or E.6 Failure to Comply with University Directive.

Class Recordings

The sessions in this course will be **not** recorded or live-streamed. The unauthorized video or audio recording of academic activities (e.g., lectures, course discussions, office hours, etc.) by a student is prohibited. Students with a reasonable accommodation for recording approved by Student Disability Services should notify each instructor and provide the Letter of Accommodation prior to using the accommodation. A student may record classroom activities with prior written permission from the instructor and notice to other students in the class that audio or video recording may occur. Any and all classroom recording must be for personal academic use only. The distribution, sharing, sale, or posting of recordings on the internet (including social media), in whole or in part, is prohibited and doing so may be a violation of the Code of Student Life and/or state or federal privacy, copyright, or other laws.

Mental Health

Students are encouraged to be mindful of their mental health and seek help as a preventive measure or if feeling overwhelmed and/or struggling to meet course expectations. Students are encouraged to talk to their instructor for assistance with specific class-related concerns. For additional support and counseling, students are encouraged to contact University Counseling Service (UCS). Information about UCS, including resources and how to schedule an appointment, can be found at counseling.uiowa.edu. Find out more about UI mental health services at: mentalhealth.uiowa.edu.

Basic Needs and Student Support

It can be difficult to maintain focus and be present if you are experiencing challenges with meeting basic needs or navigating personal crisis situations. The Office of the Dean of Students can help. Contact us for one-on-one support, identifying options, and to locate and access basic needs resources (such as food, rent, childcare, etc.).

[Student Care and Assistance](#)

132 IMU

dos-assistance@uiowa.edu

319-335-1162

Basic Needs info:

- [Food Pantry at Iowa](#)
- [Clothing Closet](#)
- [Basic Needs and Support Resources](#)

Sexual Harassment/Sexual Misconduct and Supportive Measures

The University of Iowa prohibits all forms of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and related retaliation. The [Policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct](#) governs actions by students, faculty, staff and visitors. Incidents of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct can be reported to the [Office of Civil Rights Compliance](#) or to the [Department of Campus Safety](#). Students impacted by sexual harassment or sexual misconduct may be eligible for academic supportive measures and can learn more by [contacting the Office of Civil Rights Compliance](#). Information about confidential resources and videos explaining these resources can be found on the [Office of Civil Rights Compliance website](#).

Conflict Resolution

The Office of the Ombudsperson is a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent resource for any member of the university community with a problem or concern. The Office of the Ombudsperson offers a safe place to discuss conflicts or concerns. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance. The office will brainstorm with students to help identify options, answer any questions, and provide referrals to other offices as appropriate. More information about the Office of the Ombudsperson, including how to schedule an appointment, can be found at ombudsperson.org.uiowa.edu.